

The Attributes of God 16. the Wrath of God

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Transcript

THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

16. THE WRATH OF GOD

It is sad to find so many professing Christians who appear to regard the wrath of God as something for which they need to make an apology, or at least they wish there were no such thing. While some would not go so far as to openly admit that they consider it a blemish on the Divine character, yet they are far from regarding it with delight, they like not to think about it, and they rarely hear it mentioned without a secret resentment rising up in their hearts against it. Even with those who are more sober in their judgment, not a few seem to imagine that there is a severity about the Divine wrath which is too terrifying to form a theme for profitable contemplation. Others harbor the delusion that God's wrath is not consistent with His goodness, and so seek to banish it from their thoughts. Yes, many there are who turn away from a vision of God's wrath as though they were called to look upon some blotch in the Divine character, or some blot upon the Divine government. But what saith the Scriptures? As we turn to them we find that God has made no attempt to conceal the fact of His wrath. He is not ashamed to make it known that vengeance and fury belong unto Him. His own challenge is, "See now that I, even I, am He, and there is no god with Me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal; neither is there any that can deliver out of My hand. For I lift up My hand to heaven, and say, I live forever, If I whet My glittering sword, and Mine hand take hold on judgment; I will render vengeance to Mine enemies, and will reward them that hate Me" (Deut. 32:39-41). A study of the concordance will show that there are more references in Scripture to the anger, fury, and wrath of God, than there are to His love and tenderness. Because God is holy, He hates all sin; And because He hates all sin, His anger burns against the sinner: Psalm 7:11. Now the wrath of God is as much a Divine perfection as is His faithfulness, power, or mercy. It must be so, for there is no blemish whatever, not the slightest defect in the character of God; yet there would be if "wrath" were absent from Him! Indifference to sin is a moral blemish, and he who hates it not is a moral leper. How could He who is the Sum of all excellency look with equal satisfaction upon virtue and vice, wisdom and folly? How could He who is infinitely holy disregard sin and refuse to manifest His "severity" (Rom. 9:12) toward it? How could He who delights only in that which is pure and lovely, loathe and hate not that which is impure and vile? The very nature of God makes Hell as real a necessity, as imperatively and eternally requisite as Heaven is. Not only is there no imperfection in God, but there is no perfection in Him that is less perfect than another. The wrath of God is His eternal detestation of all unrighteousness. It is the displeasure and indignation of Divine equity against evil. It is the holiness of God stirred into activity against sin. It is the moving cause of that just sentence which He passes upon evil-doers. God is angry

against sin because it is a rebelling against His authority, a wrong done to His inviolable sovereignty. Insurrectionists against God's government shall be made to know that God is the Lord. They shall be made to feel how great that Majesty is which they despise, and how dreadful is that threatened wrath which they so little regarded. Not that God's anger is a malignant and malicious retaliation, inflicting injury for the sake of it, or in return for injury received. No; while God will vindicate His dominion as the Governor of the universe, He will not be vindictive. That Divine wrath is one of the perfections of God is not only evident from the considerations presented above, but is also clearly established by the express declarations of His own Word. "For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven" (Rom. 1:18). Robert Haldane comments on this verse as follows: It was revealed when the sentence of death was first pronounced, the earth cursed, and man driven out of the earthly paradise; and afterwards by such examples of punishment as those of the Deluge and the destruction of the Cities of the Plain by fire from heaven; but especially by the reign of death throughout the world. It was proclaimed in the curse of the law on every transgression, and was intimated in the institution of sacrifice. In the 8th of Romans, the apostle calls the attention of believers to the fact that the whole creation has become subject to vanity, and groaneth and travaileth together in pain. The same creation which declares that there is a God, and publishes His glory, also proclaims that He is the Enemy of sin and the Avenger of the crimes of men . . . But above all, the wrath of God was revealed from heaven when the Son of God came down to manifest the Divine character, and when that wrath was displayed in His sufferings and death, in a manner more awful than by all the tokens God had before given of His displeasure against sin. Besides this, the future and eternal punishment of the wicked is now declared in terms more solemn and explicit than formerly. Under the new dispensation there are two revelations given from heaven, one of wrath, the other of grace.

Again; that the wrath of God is a Divine perfection is plainly demonstrated by what we read of in Psalm 95:11, "Unto whom I swear in My wrath." There are two occasions of God "swearing": in making promises (Gen. 22:16), and in denouncing threatening (Deut. 1:34). In the former, He swears in mercy to His children; in the latter, He swears to terrify the wicked. An oath is for solemn confirmation: Hebrews 6:16. In Genesis 22:16 God said, "By Myself have I sworn." In Psalm 89:35 He declares, "Once have I sworn by My holiness." While in Psalm 95:11 He affirmed, "I swear in My wrath." Thus the great Jehovah Himself appeals to His "wrath" as a perfection equal to His "holiness": He swears by the one as much as by the other! Again; as in Christ "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9), and as all the Divine perfections are illustriously displayed by Him (John 1:18), therefore do we read of "the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev. 6:16). The wrath of God is a perfection of the Divine character upon which we need to frequently meditate. First, that our hearts may be duly impressed by God's detestation of sin. We are ever prone to regard sin lightly, to gloss over its hideousness, to make excuses for it. But the more we study and ponder God's abhorrence of sin and His frightful vengeance upon it, the more likely are we to realize its heinousness. Second, to beget a true fear in our souls for God: "Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28,29). We cannot serve Him "acceptably" unless there is due "reverence" for His awful Majesty and "godly fear" of His righteous anger, and these are best promoted by frequently calling to mind that "our God is a consuming fire." Third, to draw out our souls in fervent praise for having delivered us from "the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:10). Our readiness or our reluctance to meditate upon the wrath of God becomes a sure test of how our hearts' really stand affected toward Him. If we do not truly rejoice in God, for what He is in Himself, and that because of all the perfections which are eternally resident in Him, then how dwelleth the love of God in us? Each of us needs to be most prayerfully on his guard against devising an image of God in our thoughts which is patterned after our own evil inclinations. Of old the Lord complained, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether as thyself" (Ps. 50:21), If we rejoice not "at the remembrance of His

holiness" (Ps. 97:12), if we rejoice not to know that in a soon coming Day God will make a most glorious display of His wrath, by taking vengeance on all who now oppose Him, it is proof positive that our hearts are not in subjection to Him, that we are yet in our sins, on the way to the everlasting burnings. "Rejoice, O ye nations (Gentiles) His people, for He will avenge the blood of His servants, and will render vengeance to His adversaries" (Deut. 32:43). And again we read, "I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God; For true and righteous are His judgments: for He hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of His servants at her hand. And again they said Alleluia." (Rev. 19:13). Great will be the rejoicing of the saints in that day when the Lord shall vindicate His majesty, exercise His awful dominion, magnify His justice, and overthrow the proud rebels who have dared to defy Him. "If thou Lord, shouldest mark (impute) iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" (Ps. 130:3). Well may each of us ask this question, for it is written, "the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment" (Ps. 1:5). How sorely was Christ's soul exercised with thoughts of God's marking the iniquities of His people when they were upon Him! He was "amazed and very heavy" (Mark 14:33). His awful agony, His bloody sweat, His strong cries and supplications (Heb. 5:7), His reiterated prayers ("If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me"), His last dreadful cry, ("My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?") all manifest what fearful apprehensions He had of what it was for God to "mark iniquities." Well may poor sinners cry out, "Lord who shall stand" when the Son of God Himself so trembled beneath the weight of His wrath? If thou, my reader, hast not "fled for refuge" to Christ, the only Saviour, "how wilt thou do in the swelling of the Jordan?" (Jer. 12:5)? When I consider how the goodness of God is abused by the greatest part of mankind, I cannot but be of his mind that said, The greatest miracle in the world is God's patience and bounty to an ungrateful world. If a prince hath an enemy got into one of his towns, he doth not send them in provision, but lays close siege to the place, and doth what he can to starve them. But the great God, that could wink all His enemies into destruction, bears with them, and is at daily cost to maintain them. Well may He command us to bless them that curse us, who Himself does good to the evil and unthankful. But think not, sinners, that you shall escape thus; God's mill goes slow, but grinds small; the more admirable His patience and bounty now is, the more dreadful and unsupportable will that fury be which ariseth out of His abused goodness. Nothing smoother than the sea, yet when stirred into a tempest, nothing rageth more. Nothing so sweet as the patience and goodness of God, and nothing so terrible as His wrath when it takes fire. (Wm Gurnall, 1660).

Then flee, my reader, flee to Christ; "flee from the wrath to come" (Matt. 3:7) ere it be too late. Do not, we earnestly beseech you, suppose that this message is intended for somebody else. It is to you! Do not be contented by thinking you have already fled to Christ. Make certain! Beg the Lord to search your heart and show you yourself.

A Word to Preachers. Brethren, do we in our oral ministry, preach on this solemn subject as much as we ought? The Old Testament prophets frequently told their hearers that their wicked lives provoked the Holy One of Israel, and that they were treasuring up to themselves wrath against the day of wrath. And conditions in the world are no better now than they were then! Nothing is so calculated to arouse the careless and cause carnal professors to search their hearts, as to enlarge upon the fact that "God is angry with the wicked every day" (Ps. 7:11). The forerunner of Christ warned his hearers to "flee from the wrath to come" (Matt. 3:7). The Saviour bade His auditors "Fear Him, which after He hath killed, hath power to cast into Hell; yea, I say unto you. Fear Him" (Luke 12:5). The apostle Paul said, "Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11). Faithfulness demands that we speak as plainly about Hell as about Heaven.

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